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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY 2019
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5918
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7920
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 3452
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1211
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG 4954
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 9563
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2029
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 1975
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 001380

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EINV](#) [PHUM](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS STRIKES IN THE AMAZON

REF: LIMA 1046

Classified By: DCA James Nealon for reasons 1.4b and d.

11. (C) Summary: Indigenous Peruvians in various parts of the Amazon on August 9 launched an indefinite strike aimed at protecting indigenous lands against the alleged threat of an influx of outside investors. The protestors' principal demand is that the government revoke presidential decrees (passed earlier this year as part of the PTPA package) that enable investors to operate on community-held lands after securing approval of a simple majority of the local community. The GOP has publicly taken a hard line against the protests, prepared to mobilize 1500 security personnel to the area, and demanded that protest-leaders end the strike before the government will re-enter negotiations. Government officials have accused radical political leaders of inflaming the protests, charges that protest organizers deny. End Summary.

Timeline of Events

12. (U) On August 9th, indigenous Peruvians in various parts of the Amazon launched an indefinite strike aimed at protecting indigenous lands against the alleged threat of an influx of outside investors. Protestors in parts of Loreto (base of petroleum firm Pluspetrol), Cusco (base of natural gas firm Camisea), and Amazonas regions cut off roads, surrounded oil and gas installations, and threatened to halt the flow of energy resources from the jungle. Initial negotiations held between Environment Minister Antonio Brack and indigenous representative Alberto Pizango, from the NGO Aidesep (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle), fell apart on August 15th when Brack admitted that he did not have the authority to revoke presidential decrees that had incited the protestors.

13. (U) In clashes with security forces the following day, protestors injured two police officers and took several hostages. Further clashes on the 18th left another nine people injured, according to press reports. The GOP in response declared a state of emergency in three provinces and publicly guaranteed the continued flow of energy resources. The government also prepared to mobilize some 1500 police and military personnel to the region to protect oil and natural gas installation, according to Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo.

Protestor Demands: Revoke Decrees Threatening Indigenous Lands

14. (SBU) The protestors' principal demand is that the government revoke presidential decrees 1015 and 1073 -- passed earlier this year as part of the Peru Trade Promotion Agreement implementation package. These decrees reduce from two thirds to a simple majority the percentage of local community members required to approve changes in the status of community-owned land. Indigenous leaders say the government passed these laws without input from indigenous communities and fear that the laws will make it easier for private interests to enter and take over land the communities consider their own. One Embassy contact with ties to a key protest leader explained that for Amazonian communities, land is the only possession and it represents both their livelihood and their way of life. Communities will do anything to defend their land if they believe it is under threat. Our contact added that if the government sought to forcibly end the strike, it would only turn the protest leaders into martyrs.

Government Response: Strikes Must End Before Negotiations

15. (SBU) The GOP has publicly taken a hard line against the protests and demanded that protest-leaders end the strike before the government will re-enter negotiations. A military official based in Lima told poloff that the government views the dispute through the lens of protests that occurred in Moquegua region in June 2008, when protestors cut off supply routes to southern Peru and embarrassed the government by taking several police officers hostage (ref). The government wants to maintain its authority in this situation and has so far stuck to a hard-line position, said the official. That said, the GOP's priority remains a peaceful settlement of the strike and the release of hostages, and it would only consider using security forces to clear roads and installations as a last resort.

Radical Political Leaders Behind Strike?

16. (SBU) As with previous protests, both Prime Minister del Castillo and Environment Minister Antonio Brack have alleged that radical political leaders have manipulated indigenous leaders to exacerbate tensions with the government and aggravate the strike. Del Castillo has specifically accused Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) Congressman Victor Isla -- a Loreto representative with known links to Venezuela -- of convincing indigenous leaders to reject a deal that had been negotiated with the government on August 15th. PNP leader Ollanta Humala has publicly acknowledged that some of his supporters have backed the strikes, saying "We cannot say that there are no 'nationalists' involved in these protests...The communities...are making a legitimate claim." Aidesep leader Alberto Pizango, however, has denied any linkage with any political party or foreign actor, saying that such a linkage would only bring more problems. Asked about Victor Isla's alleged role in undermining negotiations, one PNP Congressman told poloff that he doubted Isla had that much influence.

Comment: The Latest in a Series of Protests

17. (C) The Amazonian protests are the latest in a series of strikes that have roiled Peruvian society in the past year. Whereas national-level protests with diverse and diffuse goals have failed to mobilize significant government opposition, regionally-focused protests with limited and concrete ends have had much more success. Radical political leaders may be manipulating strike leaders and inflaming tensions, but underlying grievances and poor communication appear to be the root problems. We should expect more such protests in the year to come.

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